

## **Chapter 1: Into Reconstruction and Out Again**

- Wilmington was a profitable port town that was kept open for blockade traffic during the Civil War until it was occupied by federal troops in February 1865. After occupation, thousands of white and black refugees flooded the city. The city was in financial ruin after the war. Combined efforts of the military and businessmen, both native and carpetbagger, resulted in a quick rebound for the city's economy, leading to small booms in the 1870s.
- Wilmington featured a hierarchal society both before and after the Civil War. From the top down the prewar pyramid was established planter gentry characterized by inherited status; businessmen, including an immigrant population (people who arrived in the city within a generation); white working class, typified by native and immigrant non-slaveholding laborers; free blacks, many of them employed as artisans; and, lastly, urban slaves. The hierarchy survived the Civil War, but the planter class and business class merged and maintained control of political affairs amid a large black and immigrant population. After Emancipation, the native black population of Wilmington established itself with a stronger footing than that of blacks recently arrived in the city.
- Reconstruction began in Wilmington with Federal occupation and control of government by military leaders. The Freedmen's Bureau and benevolent organizations sent workers to assist freedmen in land acquisition, labor disputes, educational advancement, and political development.
- Reconstruction can be divided into Presidential and Congressional, or Radical, phases. Presidential Reconstruction resulted in a return to power of the Conservative ruling elite. Radical Reconstruction began with a Republican electoral victory in 1868 and lasted until 1877 when Conservative elements regained control of state and local government.
- Union Leagues and the Ku Klux Klan both drew members in Wilmington. The Klan faded from public view in Wilmington in 1868, and the Union League disappeared by 1870. Both organizations sponsored vigilante violence and political activism.
- During Reconstruction, Republican and Conservative elements vied for power in state and local affairs. Wilmington, because of a large, well-organized black Republican population, was unusual in state politics, and, although Conservatives regained power, Republicans and blacks were able to maintain a presence. Carpetbaggers played a role in Wilmington's postwar development.
- Wilmington's African American population developed a complex society in the 1870s and 1880s, witnessing cultural, social, educational, civic, business, and political advances that would form the foundation for development in the 1890s.